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Written Analysis Paper

Introduction

The Children's Literacy Charity (2022) explains that there are many benefits to traditional storytelling with young children. They state that reading stories and singing with babies and children from 0 – 7 years old, builds the fundamental foundations for language development and acquisition. Further to this, the National Literacy Trust (2017) supports the idea that in today's day and age, competent digital literacy equally encourages the development of language and literacy learning opportunities for children, through digital formats such as e-books, applications, and interactive activities. This analysis will evaluate traditional and digital storytelling behaviours and skills, along with the potential barriers to language and literacy development in babies and young children. Furthermore, the preventative measures and opportunities adults can provide to encourage children's language and literacy will also be discussed.

Main Body

Mendoza (2015) explains that the way stories are told has evolved widely over time. For example, she explains that storytelling began with visual drawings such as hieroglyphics on cave walls dating back 30,000 years. Moving through time, oral storytelling methods were used along with written symbols dating back 9,000 years, where stories were passed down through generations by word of mouth. The British Museum (2019) supports Mendoza's (2015) ideas by saying that storytelling is the oldest form of communication and art. Mendoza (2015) states that due to the advancement of technology and digital approaches in today's modern age, technology has allowed us to tell stories in further ways such as through videos and recordings, through photographs and written words on digital devices. Therefore, it is essential that adults and educational settings support all children's language and literacy development in the digital age in line with their individual learning needs (Welsh Government, 2015a).

Reading to children from birth has a wealth of emotional, social, and cognitive benefits, as well as creating opportunities for early language development (Klein, 2020). This is supported by the National Childbirth Trust (2022), who says reading to babies and toddlers allows them to gain understanding of their own feelings, and of others around them. This allows them to learn to communicate their emotions and develop social skills. In addition to this, it is further

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explained that many children's books contain skills such as onomatopoeia (words that sound like what they say, for example 'bang' 'roar' 'woosh' (Cambridge Dictionary, 2022)), rhymes, repetition, and alliteration. This allows practitioners and caregivers to introduce new vocabulary that children may not be used to hearing in everyday conversation. Therefore, this promotes the development of babies' vocabulary, language and literacy.

Lewis (2019) agrees with the National Childbirth Trust's (2022) view, but suggests that reading to babies is just as important for building relationships and creating feelings of safety, trust and closeness with caregivers. By building these positive relationships from an early age, children will feel confidence and encouragement to develop their language and literacy skills from the support of present adults and through self-actualization. This is an example of Maslow's hierarchy of needs as explained by McLeod (2020). Lewis (2019) further states that reading aloud and conversing with babies and young children, also encourages them to begin pointing, reaching, touching, and looking. These physical and cognitive cues are a result of adult interaction and is a non-verbal form of language and communication. Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory supports Lewis (2019) as it studies the influence of people and the environment on children's cognitive development (McLeod, 2021). Therefore, adults who read to children from birth in a language rich environment can help encourage the development of emotional, social, and cognitive skills within babies and children.

During both the traditional and digital storytelling activities, some similarities are clear between the two formats. Firstly, the narrator used dialogic reading as explained by Vaahtoranta *et al*, (2019). The narrator encouraged conversation and discussion around the story during both activities, with open questions being asked throughout. Also, at the end of the traditional storytelling activity, the children were given time to reflect on the animals in the story. By sharing the storybook reading in this way, the children remain engaged and will strengthen their understanding through discussion. Therefore, this promotes the development of vocabulary and knowledge around the meaning of words, thus promoting the development of their language skills. This is further supported by Morgan and Meier (2010) who states that dialogical reading strengthens language and oracy skills, which therefore results in children becoming competent readers of literacy.

However, it can be argued that dialogical reading does not benefit all children. Mol, *et al* (2008) agrees that dialogic reading has a positive impact on children with higher ability language and

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literacy skills, as they can fully understand the ideas and concepts of questions and discussion around the story. However, Mol *et al* (2008) further argues that children with lower language and literacy abilities may find it difficult to grasp the requests and concepts described by the narrator through dialogic reading, as they may feel overwhelmed for their individual level of development.

Another skill noted in both the traditional and digital storytelling activities is the use of prosodic features of speech such as intonation, stress, and rhythm. Prieto and Roseano (2018) defines prosody as changing the pitch of one's voice, introducing pauses, whispers or raised voices for dramatic effects. In addition, the narrator used different voices for different characters to engage the children and make the stories exciting and fun. By using intonation and prosodic features of speech, it helps children to better understand the feelings of the characters and the sequence of the stories (British Council, 2022).

Rondon (2020) supports Prieto and Roseano (2018), but also suggests that singing, rhyming, and repeating words and stories encourages language and literacy development. For example, the repetitive language and actions of songs and nursery rhymes, or rhyming stories, helps babies and young children learn language and literacy skills more easily through familiarity. This is supported by the ideas of Bruner's Spiral Curriculum, which states that children can learn almost anything through forms of repetition (Johnson, 2012). Therefore, it is important that adults and caregivers create opportunities to read to children as often as possible and whenever possible.

However, the National Literacy Trust (2021) undertook a study which revealed that over 400,000 children in the UK do not own a book of their own at home, 1 in 11 of these children also receive free school meals. In addition to this, these children also come from low-income households and deprived areas. Therefore, they are more likely to miss out on many of the language and literacy benefits of having access to their own books at home. This is a concern, as Welsh Government (2020) states that 50% of children that live in these areas are already facing the possibility of starting school with impoverished communication skills.

During the traditional storytelling activity, the narrator also used several different props to support the storytelling skills. According to Datta (2022), there are several benefits to using props for reading. For example, they help expand a child's imagination and it encourages them to visualise objects whilst hearing the words that go with them. Datta (2022) further explains

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that the use of props helps children relate to characters and their feelings, as adults also use different expressions and voices while using props. Therefore, this encourages cognitive development, as well as increased language and literacy competence. National Deaf Children's Society (2022) agrees with Datta (2022) but adds that using props encourages better understanding for children with hearing impairments. Using different objects to demonstrate storytelling is an important method to support children that face barriers to their language and literacy development. Despite this, Stadler and Ward's (2010) findings suggest that there is not a drastic difference in a child's ability to retell and recall a story with the use of props. They explain that although props did have a positive impact on the children's ability to use descriptive language, there was not an effect on their ability to retell the stories at length or in depth.

In contrast to the similarities, one difference can be noted whilst comparing the traditional and digital storytelling methods. Reading a story through a digital format may not seem as heart-warming and engaging as telling a story with a physical book. According to Kasami's (2018) findings, digital storytelling may present problems such as grasping the audience and keeping them engaged. In addition, he also explains that digital devices may be difficult to use for some children, especially those who may not be highly digitally literate. However, with digital devices and approaches to learning becoming more and more relevant in today's digital age, it is important that caregivers provide opportunities to improve children's digital literacy skills.

For example, Welsh Government (2019) explains that the language and communication area of the curriculum will aim to develop 'ambitious, capable learners, ready to learn throughout their lives'. This means that children will be encouraged to communicate effectively using 'a variety of different media' in both English and Welsh. The approach to further encourage language and literacy development in children is supported by Welsh Government (2020), as they have implemented a Speech and Language Delivery Plan to be carried out between 2020 and 2022. In addition to this, Donaldson's 2022 curriculum - Successful Futures - as outlined by Welsh Government (2015b) also talks about introducing digital approaches to learning in education for the current and future generations of children. Therefore, this reinforces the idea that settings and caregivers are having to implement new opportunities for learning digitally as well as traditionally. By doing so, children will be able to build their confidence and 'adapt skilfully to different roles', thus enhancing their future employability as well as literacy (Welsh Government, 2019).

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It can be argued that the over-use of digital technology and extended screen time amongst children can have a negative impact on their language development. Birken's (2017) findings from the research on 894 children aged 0 – 2 years, suggests there is a link between handheld screen time and expressive speech delay. Her research found that children who had access to handheld digital devices for more than 30 minutes were 49% more at risk of experiencing expressive speech delay. However, because this study is one of the first of its kind, it is difficult to solely rely on the findings of this research.

On the other hand, there is evidence to suggest that the COVID-19 pandemic has had an impact on the level of screentime and children's language and literacy development. Winther and Byrne (2020) suggest that screentime can have some benefits, for example communicating with other people and being able to use applications for learning. However, in contrast they say that screentime has become a barrier to children's physical exercise. Chadd, Moyse and Enderby (2021) agree, but add that COVID-19 has had a serious impact on Speech and Language Therapy referrals. Patients needing access to professional services have experienced delayed referrals. Therefore, this has especially impacted the children born just before and during the pandemic, and has impacted their speech and language competence when beginning school (Welsh Government, 2020). As a result of this, children beginning education post pandemic must receive additional support in settings to prevent possible speech and language delays or complications.

Conclusion

To conclude, supporting children's language and literacy development in the digital age is an important aspect of an adult's role. With the ever-increasing use of technology within settings and home lives, it is essential that caregivers create ways to provide language rich environments for babies and young children. This will help support their learning of language and literacy digitally and traditionally. As discussed by Lewis (2019) and Klein (2020), the benefits of traditional storytelling outweigh the limitations, however, the emergence of new digital story telling methods may suggest that traditional storytelling methods are disappearing. The research by Birken (2017) and the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic suggest that adults must monitor screen time amongst young children to prevent potential barriers to language development. Therefore, traditional and digital storytelling methods are an effective way to begin, maintain and improve children's language and literacy development.

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